

# focus on ***Fish & Wildlife***

## ***Otters across Indiana***

### ***Releases completed, biologists will monitor the progress of otters reintroduced to Indiana***

On a mild February afternoon, we opened the last cage door and river otter F-584 made the Little Blue River its new home. This marked the end of the release phase of Indiana's River Otter Reintroduction Program.

Since 1995, we have released over 300 otters statewide in an attempt to return this charismatic native mammal to Indiana's lakes, rivers, and streams. The otters fostered immediate interest that quickly became involvement for thousands of Hoosiers. State and federal agencies, universities, trapping organizations, businesses, schools, and supportive individuals became partners in bringing otters back to Indiana. With releases now complete, we thought we would look back and evaluate our progress to date.

North American river otters originally inhabited all major watersheds in Indiana. Like the beaver, they were sought as furbearers by early European settlers. Native populations declined sharply by the mid 1800s due to loss of wetland and riverine habitats, human settlement, and unregulated fur harvest. Indiana moved to protect otters in 1921, but they were believed lost from the state by 1942.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife began efforts to restore otters to Indiana in 1993 with a feasibility study that reviewed otter ecology, regulations, statewide habitat conditions, logistics, funding, and personnel requirements. Factors considered most important in assessing habitat were water quality, bank and in-stream structures for den sites, prey base, and the availability of wetlands adjacent to stream corridors. Biologists identified six watersheds as the most suitable



### ***Topics this issue. . .***

*Blue ribbon smallmouth streams*

*Indiana's Big River Program*

*Land for fish and wildlife*

*Jack Cooper*

# Director of *Fish & Wildlife*



**Gary Doxtater**  
**DFW Director**

For decades the money that hunters and anglers pay in taxes on equipment and license fees has been used to manage and protect Indiana game animals and sportfish. Now those species thrive. Not one game animal has been listed on the federal endangered species list in the last 25 years. If only we could offer the same protection to other animals in Indiana.

Now we have a chance to do this. Congress is considering a bill called the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999. Off-shore oil and gas production will provide the source of funds for the legislation. Money given to the states from Title III (Teaming With Wildlife) of this bill would be used for:

- 1) Conservation of a diverse variety of wildlife populations,
- 2) Wildlife-related recreation, and
- 3) Wildlife-related education.

With these funds, we could do research, inventory and monitor wildlife. This knowledge could lead to better management and protection for a variety of diverse species. Wildlife education

could begin in urban areas where we have no formal programs at present.

Naturalists could blanket the state with educational programs for all ages. As Hoosiers learn more about their natural heritage, protecting it for

the future will become even more important. Wildlife-related recreation could be enhanced through better facilities for wildlife watchers, hikers, trail users and paddlers.

Title II of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act also provides money for state and local parks. Improving habitat for wildlife along Lake Michigan is addressed by Title I of the legislation.

Indiana, like the rest of the nation, is encountering losses of songbirds, amphibians, fish, and species of mammals. We cannot let this happen. Over 75 conservation-minded groups have formed the Indiana Teaming With Wildlife Coalition to make known their support for the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999. The coalition stresses the importance of letting state officials and federal legislators know about the support that exists for this important legislation. Let's leave a rich heritage of wildlife for our children and grandchildren while we can.



## **TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE** *a natural investment*

### **Division Mission**

*"To manage fish and wildlife for present and future generations, balancing ecological, recreational and economic benefits."*



*Focus on Fish & Wildlife* is a quarterly publication from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife. *Focus on Fish & Wildlife* seeks to educate sportsmen and women, conservationists, wildlife recreationists and all Hoosiers on topics related to the management of Indiana's fish and wildlife resources.

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# ***River Otter Releases***

## ***1995 - 1999***

### **Muscatatuck River Watershed**

Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge (*Jackson Co.*)

25 otters (15M:10F) released in 1995.

Jefferson Proving Grounds (*Ripley & Jennings Co.*)

31 otters (19M:12F) released in 1996 and 1999.

### **Tippecanoe River Watershed**

Tippecanoe River State Park (*Pulaski Co.*)

26 otters (16M:10F) released in 1996.

Etna Green (*Kosciusko Co.*)

24 otters (14M:10F) released in 1996.

### **Patoka River Watershed**

Patoka Lake (*Orange Co.*)

24 otters (14M:10F) released in 1997.

Sugar Ridge Fish & Wildlife Area (*Pike Co.*)

25 otters (16M:9F) released in 1997.

### **St. Joseph River Watershed**

Mallard Roost Wetland Conservation Area,

South Branch Elkhart River (*Noble Co.*)

27 otters (17M:10F) released in 1997 and 1998.

Pigeon River Fish & Wildlife Area (*Lagrange Co.*)

25 otters (15M:10F) released in 1998.

### **Upper Wabash River Watershed**

Salamonie Lake (*Huntington Co.*)

25 otters (15M:10F) released in 1998.

Eel River (*Wabash Co.*)

25 otters (15M:10F) released in 1998.

### **Blue River - Southcentral Ohio River Watershed**

Blue River (*Crawford Co.*)

23 otters (14M:9F) released in 1999.

Little Blue River (*Crawford Co.*)

23 otters (14M:9F) released in 1999.



for otter reintroductions: Muscatatuck, Tippecanoe, Patoka, St. Joseph, Upper Wabash, and the Blue-Southcentral Ohio river watersheds.

Our river otters came to Indiana by way of coastal Louisiana where they were wild-captured and purchased for \$400 each from a private supplier. Upon their arrival in Indiana, veterinarians from Purdue University's School of Veterinary Medicine examined each otter and treated them for injuries. Although the Division of Fish and Wildlife paid Purdue University for supplies, vaccinations, and other related expenses, all medical personnel donated their time and services to provide health care to the otters. In fact, many of these veterinarians have returned annually to participate in the otter work-ups.

We used radiotelemetry to monitor Indiana's first otters released in 1995 at the Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge. The results were encouraging. First-year, post-release survival was 71 percent, and the radioed otters dispersed an average of only 1.8 miles from their release sites. Most otters restricted half of their annual activities to an area less than two square miles in size. More importantly, these 'core areas' were on or adjacent to the refuge. It was clear to us that the otters had become familiar with their new surroundings and were well-established on the refuge. In their second breeding season, we found three litters of otter pups. Based on this initial success, the Indiana River Otter Reintroduction Program was created with a goal of restoring viable otter populations in the six priority watersheds.

Of the 303 otters (184M:119F) released at 12 sites in Indiana only 29 (10 percent) have been found dead. As expected, road-kills and incidental trapping were the principal sources of mortality. While such losses are unfortunate, they were anticipated and they should not affect our long-term prospects for success. Nearly all trap-related mortalities have occurred over 20 miles from release sites, which indicates the excellent cooperation we have received from Indiana's licensed trappers. Near release sites, many trappers have refrained from using sets likely to capture otters or have moved their trapping activities into other areas. This spirit of partnership to reach a common goal is further illustrated by the Indiana State Trappers Association. Through T-shirts and hat sales, they raised funds for biologists to purchase radiotelemetry equipment and to purchase fish to feed the otters before their release. In the last four years, more than 1,400 pounds of fish, at a cost of nearly \$4,000, have been purchased by the Indiana State Trappers Association and donated to the otter program.

Our next challenge will be to determine the distribution and expanding range of the state's new residents. Otters are difficult to monitor because they tend to widely distribute themselves and their habitats are difficult to access.

Biologists must rely on more indirect measures of success such as aerial winter track surveys, field searches for otter sign, public observations, and biological information obtained from recovered animals. In winter when ice and snow cover are present, biologists will fly or drive targeted watersheds to look for otter tracks, slides, grooming areas, and other signs of otter activity.

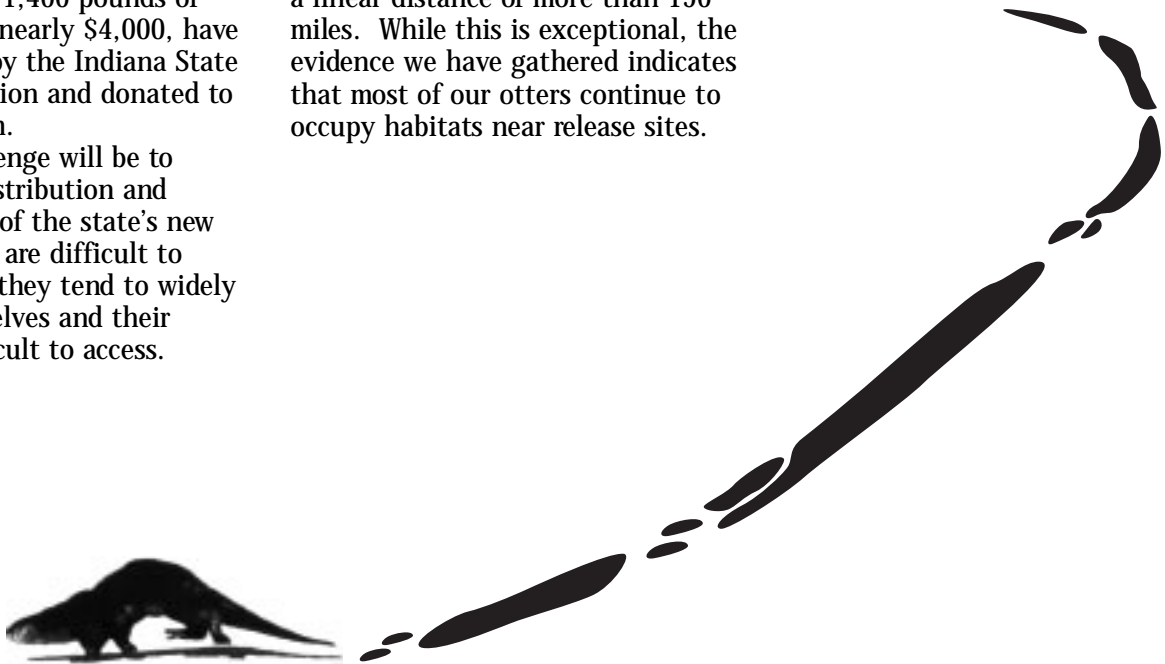
While we have observed most activity within 10 miles of original release sites, otters are known to occupy adjacent stretches of river and associated tributaries. They have also expanded into watersheds not originally targeted for restoration such as the Kankakee River in northwest Indiana. Several 'pioneering' animals moved lengthy distances from their initial release sites, such as one male from Tippecanoe River State Park. Eleven months after release, this otter was recovered near Turtle Creek Reservoir, a linear distance of more than 150 miles. While this is exceptional, the evidence we have gathered indicates that most of our otters continue to occupy habitats near release sites.

One of the hallmarks of successful reestablishment is the production of young by reintroduced animals. We have confirmed or suspect that otters have produced young at eight of 10 sites where we released otters prior to 1999. Otters at Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge and in the Tippecanoe River watershed have produced litters for several successive seasons.

Although it is too early to say that otters are here to stay, our initial results and outlook for the future are promising. ✧

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prepared by **Scott Johnson**, endangered wildlife biologist



***An 'otter slide' is a sure indication of the presence of otters in an area. Made in snow or mud, otters slide down banks leaving the impressions of their bodies, their long roundish tail, and their feet. When moving across land through snow, otter tails often create a furrow in the impression left by their bodies.***

# focus on ***Fish & Wildlife Habitat***

Among the highest priorities within the Division and Fish and Wildlife is acquiring and protecting wildlife habitats.

The purchase of the 948-acre Weyerbacker tract in Posey County highlighted efforts to acquire recreational lands for Hoosier sportsmen and women. Adjacent to Hovey Lake Fish and Wildlife Area (FWA), the Weyerbacker property contains bottomland hardwoods, sloughs, wetlands, and upland habitats.

The purchase resulted from the combined efforts of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, the Four Rivers Waterfowl Management Plan, Indiana Heritage Trust, and the National Wild Turkey Federation. Leading the way, though, were the property owners who made the purchase possible by way of a generous donation.

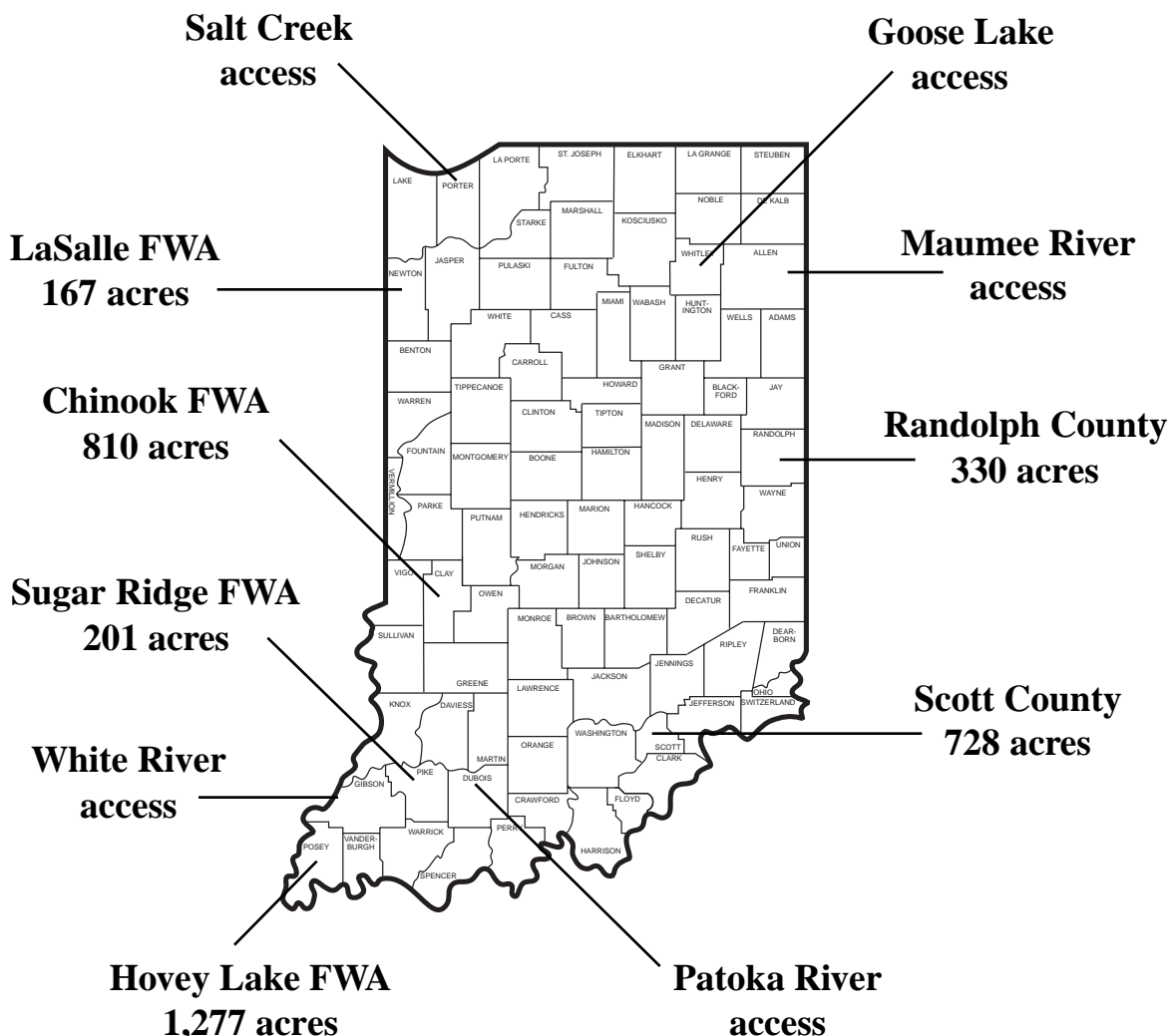
Additional public lands were also added to Hovey Lake, LaSalle, and Sugar Ridge FWAs. The Division of Fish and Wildlife acquired acreage for

the Chinook FWA project, and new wildlife management areas in Randolph and Scott Counties.

Hoosiers also gained land for access on Salt Creek (Porter County), Maumee River (Allen County), West Fork White River (Gibson County), Patoka River (Dubois County) and Goose Lake (Whitley County). The division also constructed five new public access sites in 1998. The Division of Fish and Wildlife now maintains 333 public access sites in Indiana. ✧

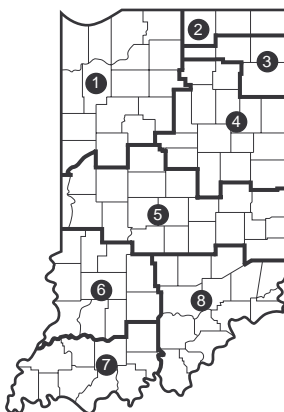
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prepared by **Clark McCreedy**, editor, *FOCUS on Fish and Wildlife* and **Mark Pochon**, manager, Hovey Lake FWA





# focus on *Indiana's Blue Ribbon Smallmouth Streams*



My brothers live in the heart of northwest Montana's blue ribbon trout country. Right about now they are waiting out the high waters of the western snow melt. They would like to be fishing. I'm going to call and tell them I'm ready to go and I'd be glad to take them, if only they lived in a state with a year-round fishery. Spring, summer, winter, and fall, Indiana's waters hold my interest every month of the year.

Last summer friends diverted my attention from northern Indiana's steelhead long enough to introduce me to Indiana's exceptional smallmouth bass. Salmon, steelhead, walleyes, bluegill, whatever your Indiana fishing preference, smallmouth deserve your attention. And, without a doubt, we have some of the best blue ribbon smallmouth fishing around.

With more than 330 public access sites (PAS) and water from north to south, smallmouth bass are within a hop, skip, and short drive from wherever you are in Indiana.

Indiana's district fisheries biologists, with more than one or two smallmouth admirers among them, recently passed along where they like their smallmouth. Without revealing too much in the way of their favorite places, here's what they said:

## **District 1**

Choose the Tippecanoe River for one of the best areas to fish for smallmouth in northwest Indiana. One of Indiana's most scenic streams, the river's watershed extends into 14 counties, with the best smallmouth water in Pulaski County. You can access the river at a number of publicly or privately owned sites



including Monterey, Warren Bridge, Tippecanoe State Park PAS, Haschell Bridge PAS, Winamac City Park PAS, and Pulaski PAS. In this section of the 'Tippy' you'll also find rock bass, channel cats, flatheads, northern pike, and the occasional Lake Shafer walleye or striped bass.

## **District 2**

By far, the St. Joe and Elkhart rivers offer anglers the best smallmouth in District 2. The St. Joe enters Indiana near Bristol and returns to Michigan north of South Bend. One of the best smallmouth areas is in downtown Mishawaka,

within the first mile downstream from the dam. The river downstream of South Bend is also worth a look. Both are urban areas but provide excellent shore and boat access. To avoid the urban setting, concentrate on the upper reach near Bristol. The best smallmouth water on the Elkhart runs from the dam in Goshen downstream to the confluence with the St. Joe. Try the water between Oxbow Park in Elkhart County and the city of Elkhart to find smallmouth.

## **District 3**

Although District 3 isn't known as smallmouth bass country, there are a few hotspots worth mentioning. Try the other St. Joe along Johnny Appleseed Park and Stevies Island in the metropolitan Fort Wayne area. Continue downstream to where the St. Joe meets the St. Mary's River. Electrofishing surveys over this stretch consistently reveal some nice smallmouth.

## **District 4**

The White River is an excellent smallmouth bass fishery from above Camp Redwing, owned by Boy Scouts of America, through Madison County. Low-head dams in Muncie create small impoundments requiring a small boat or canoe, but otherwise the river is wadeable throughout. You can access the river from city parks in Anderson and Muncie and at Mounds State Park in Madison County. Besides two pound smallmouth, you'll find largemouth bass and channel cats, especially in the impoundments.

The Mississinewa River harbors excellent smallmouth throughout its upper reaches in Randolph County to its confluence with the Wabash River near Peru. Francis Slocum State Forest, Mississinewa Reservoir, and city parks in Marion, Gas City, Matthews, Eaton, Albany, and Ridgeville provide public access. Look for the largest smallmouth from Gas City to the Wabash. Most areas are canoeable and wadeable. Besides smallmouth, the river holds excellent channel cats, rock bass and, in the lower reaches, flathead catfish.

### District 5

Central Indiana, an easy day trip away from anywhere in the Hoosier state, is positively blessed with smallmouth streams. The best in this 20 county area include Sugar Creek, the Big Blue River, Big Walnut Creek, and the Flatrock River. On Sugar Creek, meaning the Sugar Creek that flows through Shades and Turkey Run State Parks, explore the water upstream of Crawfordsville. If you aim for smallmouth on Big Walnut, concentrate your efforts upstream of Greencastle in Putnam County. A 1995 Division of Fish and Wildlife survey found the best smallmouth in the Shelby County sections of the Big Blue and Flatrock rivers.

### District 6

The East Fork of the White River offers a variety of bass fishing options. Most of the smallmouth are found from Williams Dam down to Hindoston Falls. Try the riffle areas such as Chase riffle and the water below Shoals. You might find the best action here in the fall of the year when the river is low.

The trio of Indian, Otter, and Leatherwood creeks hold smallmouth in good numbers, particularly in their upper reaches. Best fishing is usually in the spring, particularly March through May. Biologists are currently following the smallmouth in Indian Creek to evaluate the 12-inch minimum size limit for bass.

### District 7

The Blue River has the distinction of being one of Indiana's charter natural and scenic rivers. It's just as distinguished by its smallmouth. The Blue originates at the town of Salem in Washington County and runs south to the Ohio River. In 1993, a fisheries survey was conducted over 77 miles of the Blue. When compared to other streams, the Blue had some of the highest smallmouth catch rates in Indiana. Sites worth exploring include upstream of the Totten Ford Bridge just north of the Town of Milltown and the area of the river near Becks Mill. Near Becks Mill, the Blue looks more like a small stream than a river. As you move down stream toward the Ohio River, the

Blue becomes less favorable for smallmouth but better for the spotted bass. You'll find most smallmouth in the 10 to 15 inch range, but the Blue hides an occasional smallmouth of immense proportions.

### District 8

In addition to the Blue River, Laughery Creek and Indian-Kentuck Creek are smaller waters worth a day of prospecting for smallmouth. When these streams were surveyed in 1995, they both held smallmouth capable of holding the attention of your average angler.

When surveyed in 1995, the section of Laughery Creek between the dam at Versailles in Ripley County and the ford at Hartford in Ohio County supported good smallmouth with the largest coming in at over 15 inches. The same can be said of the natural section of Indian-Kentuck Creek in Jefferson County.

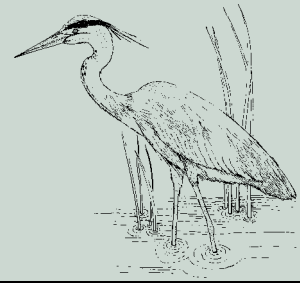
Anglers can also expect to find spotted bass and rock bass in these streams. Since both of these streams are tributaries of the Ohio River, you might also catch white bass and sauger during their upstream spring spawning migration.

### Tips

If you're going after stream smallmouth, the unanimous choice of Indiana's fisheries biologists is that you take along a healthy dose of common courtesy for Indiana's private landowners. Ask for permission before you fish on private land. When you leave the water, try to leave it in better condition than you found it. It may not foster feelings of satisfaction to pick up after others, but you'd probably be hard-pressed to find a landowner who objects to someone cleaning up a streambank.

Steve Andrews, District 6 fisheries biologist also recommends "crayfish lures and small Rapala minnows" when on Indian, Otter, and Leatherwood creeks.

For summer smallmouth, Neil Ledet in District 2 suggests "soft craws fished with an egg-shaped slip sinker and #8 wide-gap hook. Set the hook immediately to prevent deep-hooking the bass." During the spring and fall when smallmouth hold tight in heavy



## Hoosier Riverwatch Adopt-A-River

Make the water you fish more than your favorite stretch of smallmouth stream.....

Adopt it.

Adopt-A-River volunteers provide the conservation muscle to improve Indiana's rivers and streams. Clean-ups, tree plantings, and habitat projects improve water quality and quality waters mean quality fisheries. In some cases, projects qualify for grants to help cover clean-up costs. For information, contact:

**Hoosier Riverwatch**  
**402 W. Washington, Rm W265**  
**Indianapolis, IN 46204-2739**  
**317/233-3870**

cover or log jams he suggests "lead head jigs with thin wire hooks tipped with plastic grubs. When you get snagged, the thin wire jigs will often straighten, freeing you. Be prepared to reshape and sharpen your hooks."

My personal favorite is a 9-foot, 6-weight fly-rod with a full sinking line and a box full of Clouser minnows tied to resemble chubs, small rock bass, and darters. Fly-casters in the know will tell you that crayfish patterns under a strike indicator provoke smallmouth on a regular basis.

About that smallmouth across the page, it came to the surface for a popper. Sugar Creek. ♡

prepared by **Clark McCreedy**, editor of *FOCUS on Fish and Wildlife*, and Indiana's district fisheries biologists: **Bob Robertson, Neil Ledet, Jed Pearson, Ed Braun, Doug Keller, Steve Andrews, Dan Carnahan, and Larry L. Lehman**

# focus on ***Fish & Wildlife Research*** *Indiana's Big Rivers Program*

Indiana's 'Big Rivers' total some 923 miles of wide water. Just the lower 200 miles of the Wabash contain more fishing water than Indiana's five largest reservoirs combined. When you include the Patoka, the White, East Fork of the White, West Fork of the White, and

of big river catfish. Ball State biologists hope to improve sampling techniques and estimation of catfish populations. This should also shed some light on the impact of commercial fishing on catfish numbers.

The biggest of our rivers wind their way beyond Indiana. This requires big river states to work together to manage our river resources.

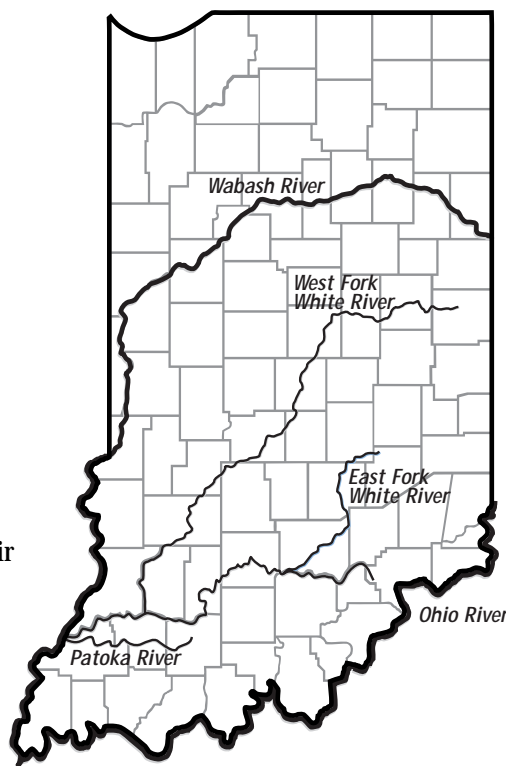
Indiana has joined a 28-state cooperative to investigate paddlefish distribution and abundance throughout their range on the big rivers.

Each cooperating state hopes to annually tag 300 wild paddlefish plus all their hatchery fish through 1999. Agencies plan to collect tags for another 15 years since paddlefish may live as long as 60 years. Indiana currently has self-sustaining paddlefish populations in the lower Wabash and middle Ohio River. A similar regional effort oriented

toward sportfish, with catfish as the leading contender, may soon be initiated. This isn't the first time that Indiana has teamed with other agencies within a watershed. The first major big river watershed organization that Indiana became involved with was the Ohio River Fish Management Team. This team includes the six Ohio River fisheries chiefs and their river biologists.

Team accomplishments include development of a river-wide access brochure, standardization of river-wide sportfishing regulations, joint angler creel surveys, and joint priority development and planning.

Two years ago this group evaluated Ohio River sportfish



priorities based on angler surveys, immediate management concerns, and the potential for improving angler success. Walleye and sauger were ranked as the greatest management priority, followed by the black bass, white and striped bass, catfish, prey fish species, and then crappie.

With this information in hand, the Ohio River Fish Management Team recently began a five year project to evaluate Ohio River walleye and sauger populations, their genetics, forage levels, and angler use. Creel surveys at six lock and dam tailwaters and field collections within tailwater pools began last fall. We'll use that information to determine fish size limits, appropriate daily bag limits, and to correlate sauger and walleye populations with forage fish levels.

Indiana's big rivers represent a sizable challenge, some would suggest even a last frontier in the field of freshwater fisheries. They also represent an outstanding sportfish resource for Hoosier anglers. The attention we give them now will protect that resource for the future. ♦

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prepared by **Tom Stefanavage**, big rivers fisheries biologist



Most of Indiana's 184 native river fishes inhabit the big rivers. This includes some of Indiana's smallest fish, such as the emerald shiner, and Indiana's largest species - blue catfish, paddlefish, and sturgeon. Here, fisheries chief Bill James cradles an Ohio River paddlefish.

the 87,000 acres of the Ohio that we share with Kentucky, Indiana's 'Big Rivers' add up to opportunity for Hoosier anglers.

Big river resources will be the focus of Indiana's fishery managers and researchers when they spend two weeks in July surveying our 466 miles of the Wabash. This will provide us with a first-time picture of fish communities, aquatic habitat, and public access along the river. We'll use this information to maintain or improve the estimated 720,000 annual fishing opportunities that the Wabash provides.

A Division of Fish and Wildlife sponsored project on the lower Wabash will provide a clearer picture



## focus on ***Outreach in Fish & Wildlife***

*Project WILD and Go FishIN involve youth, educators, and volunteers in fish and wildlife*

The future of Indiana's fish and wildlife rests in the hands of the young people of our state. How well our wildlife and their habitats fare depends upon not only how much Indiana youth care about wildlife, but upon how much they understand the principles of wildlife management.

Over the past 13 years the Division of Fish and Wildlife has offered educational programs to help prepare Indiana's youth to become tomorrow's conservation leaders.

Project WILD began in Indiana in late 1985. The program equips educators with natural resource activities that teach students from kindergarten through high school about basic wildlife ecology. The program is available throughout the United States, Canada and several other countries. In Indiana, the Division of Fish and Wildlife provides materials and trains volunteers to conduct workshops at no cost to participants. Over 20,000 Indiana educators have attended the six-hour workshops so far.

## **Project WILD of Indiana**

One of the more common requests of educators attending Project WILD workshops is for more information about wildlife in Indiana. In 1987 the Division of Fish and Wildlife began offering advanced WILD workshops that provide hands-on experiences with Indiana wildlife. Topics have included Lake Michigan fish, bats, river otters, freshwater mussels and streams, wildlife art, endangered species, frogs and toads, sandhill cranes, and more.

Project WILD can provide educators with everything from program materials on river otters to a list of sources for owl pellets. The education office also has a selection of videos, CDs, and cassette tapes for loan. Soon educators will be able to borrow specimen collections of Indiana animals.

Education alone will not move people to take action for wildlife. Positive experiences with wildlife can provide the motivation to make informed decisions. To create more opportunities for students to interact with wildlife and their habitats, WILD Action Grants and Go FishIN programs were created.

The WILD Action Grant program allows teams of students and teachers to attend a training session on habitat improvement and then apply for a grant of up to \$1,000 to do a habitat improvement project. Many schoolyard and park projects have been funded through which students gain first-hand experience as to how they can make a difference for wildlife.



The Go FishIN program provides training, materials and equipment to adults who want to involve middle school and high school youth in a fishing crew or club. With fishing as a central theme, students learn aquatic ecology and outdoor ethics while they acquire a lifelong hobby.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife coordinates Project WILD and Go FishIN education efforts with other DNR divisions at the newly created Natural Resources Education Center at Fort Harrison State Park. The Division of Forestry's Project Learning Tree program offers curriculum workshops, resource materials and forestry CDs. The Division of Soil and Water Conservation sponsors Hoosier Riverwatch and Project WET. These programs provide materials and training for water monitoring and aquatic education. The Division of Law Enforcement offers instruction in hunter and boater safety.

These outreach programs strive to inform and involve Indiana youth. For more information contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife at 317/549-0348. ♦

prepared by **Warren Gartner**, Project WILD coordinator

focus on  
***People in Fish & Wildlife***



For 20 years Jack Cooper taught us about the outdoors through his impeccable stories and Hoosier rhymes. He might not have looked like much, sort of dusty and awkward, but once you saw inside the crusty cocoon, you'd have found a man patiently and passionately helping Indiana's natural resources and people.

He had majored in journalism in college, but needed a factory job to provide for his wife, daughter and son. When back injuries ended 25 years at National Starch in Indianapolis, he reinvented himself and became an outdoor writer.

Jack soon criss-crossed the state writing for *Outdoor Indiana* magazine, *Indiana Game and Fish*, and *Indiana Conservation Afield*. He took us panning for gold in Brown County and steelhead fishing in South Bend. We went west with him to the Columbia River, where he used giant slingshots to launch lines for sturgeon. We learned about the nuts and bolts of raising fish, and just the bolts when he rode out thunder storms collecting walleye broodstock.

District fisheries biologist Doug Keller was on one of those trips netting walleye. "We were at Brookville Lake collecting walleye eggs," said Keller. "I woke at five o'clock to driving rain and

gusting north winds. The thermometer read 45 degrees as I observed a strange pickup truck with 'Big Jake' tattooed on the bug shield. A man emerged from the truck, came in, introduced himself, and in the same breath, asked if he could take some pictures and write a story about walleye broodstock collection.

"After running a couple nets, Jack was completely soaked. Despite this, he kept snapping pictures, awed over every fish, and steadily questioned me about walleye management."

Jack subsequently wrote several outstanding articles on walleyes and was quick to write about conditions endured by biologists.

"I learned he was not crazy, but instead was totally enthralled with Indiana's fish and wildlife. Jack became a good friend," said Keller.

The number of Jack's friends seemed limited only by the number of people he met.

Steve Polston, senior editor of *Outdoor Indiana*, tells a story that illustrates the man.

"He called himself Big Jake perhaps because of the wattle under his face, but I'd rather think of Jack as a peregrine, since peregrines are wanderer hunters.

"There was no corner of the state unknown or untouched by him. He would hunt for an experience, a place, an activity, an animal or a person anywhere his spirit led him, and he always came back with a story or an anecdote to share.

"The magazine wanted a story on the highest point in Indiana. Jack found the spot, but said it was unremarkable and not worth writing about. End of story, or so I thought.

"About a year later, Jack was passing out honors at an awards

program. He had an award for me, a memento of his experience looking for Indiana's highest point. It was a bag of dirt labeled 'TOP SOIL' - contents: what **was** the highest point in Indiana."

Polston believes Jack could find good in anything, in anybody, or in any situation. Like the pilgrim wanderer and peregrine that he was, he always looked and never was disappointed.

Jack died last autumn while traveling with his wife Bev across the western mountains. Several days before he died, he sent the Division of Fish and Wildlife a postcard. It seemed he sent everyone postcards as he traveled. They were often seen tacked up in various DNR offices. He spoke fondly of the mountains and his wife. He described the wonders they saw and how he liked sharing these with Bev. He wanted us to see the wonder through his words. He mentioned in closing that he missed Indiana. Well Jack, we're writing you back. Indiana will miss you, too. ✧

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prepared by **John Maxwell**, information specialist

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**Jack Cooper Memorial Youth  
Outdoor Writing Contest.**

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Sharpen up your pencils and plug in your word processor. The Indiana Conservation Officers Organization and *Indiana Conservation Afield* magazine are sponsoring a youth outdoor writing contest as a tribute to Jack. Here is a chance to write about your first fish, first hunt or other special time outdoors. The contest is open to any Indiana resident between 10 and 12 years old. First prize is a scholarship to the 1999 Karl Kelly Youth Camp. The contest deadline is May 15. For details, call 765/629-2836.



## **Free Fishing Weekend June 12 & 13**

Enjoy a weekend of fishing this June without having to purchase a fishing license. As part of National Fishing

Week, over 25 Department of Natural Resource properties throughout the state will host special free fishing events over the weekend. Find an event near you in the 1999 *Indiana Fishing Guide* or call the division at 317/232-4080.



## **Big, Bigger, Biggest Fish records toppling at breakneck pace**



The Indiana state bighead carp benchmark was raised a couple notches last year when Jeremy Vincent, of Williams, Ind., caught a 35.88 pound, 43.5 inch bighead carp from the White River. This broke the previous record of a 25.19 pound fish caught only the year before by Henry Willerbrink, Jr. of Louisville, Ky.

The National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame has certified Willerbrink's fish as a new world record. It topped the previous record set only two weeks earlier.

Charles Powers of Boonville, Ind. landed the new state record saugeye. The 8.16 pound, 26.25 inch fish was plucked last February from Huntingburg Lake in Dubois County, the same lake that produced the previous record. The saugeye record has fallen six times since 1990.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife tracks 45 classes of record fish in two programs. The *Indiana Record Fish* program recognizes anglers for new state record fish. The *Indiana Fish of the Year* program recognizes anglers for the largest fish, short of a new state record, caught each year in Indiana. The 1999 *Indiana Fishing Guide* contains an entry form and explains requirements to enter fish for honors in either program.



## **Catch-and-release entries now accepted for Fish of the Year**

Changes in the requirements to enter the *Fish of the Year* program now allow catch-and-release anglers to participate in the program. Anglers need only provide the length and girth of their fish to enter them in the *Fish of the Year* program. See the 1999 *Fishing Guide* for more information.



## **DNR Shooting Range Program enters third year on target**

The Indiana DNR Shooting Range Program continues to target grant dollars to local governments and not-for-profit groups interested in developing or renovating public shooting and archery ranges. The program enters its third year having funded six projects worth over \$335,000.

Well-designed target ranges provide Indiana communities a safe place for sportsmen and women to enjoy shooting sports. Quality ranges also serve a vital role in teaching firearms safety and shooting ethics.

Funds for the DNR Shooting Range Program come to Indiana through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program. Shooting enthusiasts contribute to this fund each time they purchase hunting-related equipment. The DNR will devote at least \$100,000 to this program each year. The Shooting Range Program provides 50 to 75 percent of costs for approved projects.

The DNR Division of Outdoor Recreation will accept grant applications between June 1 and Sept. 1 this year. Shooting range projects require careful planning, so interested communities or organizations should plan to begin the process as soon as possible.

For information on the grant program, contact the Division of Outdoor Recreation at 317/232-4070.



Federal Aid Project  
funded by your purchase of  
fishing equipment and boating fuels

## **Indiana Waters Program creates public access for anglers and boaters**

Funds to construct, renovate, or improve fishing and boating access

sites are available to Indiana community park and recreation boards through the Indiana Waters Program. The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program provides the funds that make the program work. Everyone who purchases fishing gear contributes to sport fish restoration. These funds find their way back to Hoosier sportsmen and women through programs like Indiana Waters. Since the program began in 1988, Indiana Waters has provided over \$4.4 million to fund 45 boating or fishing access projects throughout the state.

The DNR Division of Outdoor Recreation will accept grant applications for Indiana Waters between June 1 and Sept. 1 this year. Typically, the DNR awards grants that vary between 50 and 75 percent of total project costs. Park or recreation boards interested in applying for Indiana Waters grants should begin the process as soon as possible.

For information on the grant program, contact the Division of Outdoor Recreation at 317/232-4070.



Federal Aid Project  
funded by your purchase of  
hunting equipment

# Indiana Heritage Trust



## The Environmental License Plate

Your purchase of a Heritage Trust environmental license plate helps to secure Indiana's wildlife heritage. Heritage Trust funds are used to purchase lands with unique natural resource value. The Division of Fish and Wildlife uses a portion of Heritage Trust funds to purchase public areas for fish and wildlife related recreation. In 1998, the Division of Fish and Wildlife purchased 2,715 acres using \$2.26 million from the Heritage Trust. This includes lands such as the nearly 1,000 acre Weyerbacker addition to the Hovey Lake Fish and Wildlife Area.

Invest in Indiana by asking for an environmental license plate when you renew your vehicle plates. Help conserve Indiana's land, water, and wildlife for Hoosier sportsmen and women.



Address Service Requested

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